

Joint Committee on Judiciary

Senate Bill No. 31, *An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor*
Submitted by: Catherine Bailey, Legal and Public Policy Director, Connecticut Women's
Education & Legal Fund

Submitted: March 7, 2014; Hearing: March 10, 2014

CWEALF is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls, and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For more than 40 years, CWEALF's Legal Education Program has served thousands of women by providing them access to legal information, advocacy services, community education, and attorney referrals in family law, employment, and civil rights law. With 75% of our clients earning less than \$25,000, the vast majority lack the ability to access private legal representation.

Witnessing this need for legal services firsthand, we strongly support S.B. 31, *An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor*, which would eliminate the sunset provision on the court filing fee revenue that is dedicated to legal aid. Without this bill, \$4.5 million in statewide legal aid funding would be lost next year. This would cause significant harm to the citizens of Connecticut who experience poverty and are unable to afford legal representation.

Legal aid attorneys routinely advocate for vulnerable individuals and families who are facing critical issues – education discrimination, risk of homelessness, family violence, access to health benefits, among others. They also engage in proactive programs to address root causes of poverty and support job attainment programs for their clients. Thousands of families across the state are in desperate need of these services, which must be continued.

CWEALF enjoys a close working relationship with each of the legal aid programs, and frequently exchange client referrals. Legal aid is a service that needs to be expanded; not limited. Accordingly, we urge you to support S.B. 31 and thank you for your consideration.